

Prison Privatization is Praised

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Statistics since GEO Group took over operations:

- 91 of 172 employees were retained by GEO Group and those salaries increased by an average of 6.7 percent.
- The GEO Group has created an additional 84 jobs since taking over.
- The management transition at the facility has resulted in local purchases of services and products of over \$500,000 to date.
- There are 141 offenders in education classes today; before GEO took over, there were approximately 20. There are 178 offenders in substance abuse classes today; before GEO took over, there were none.

By Darrel Radford

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More than just a prison facility was on display here Thursday. So, too, was a controversial concept.

Privatization.

Both the New Castle Correctional Facility - and the way it is being operated - drew high praise from legislators and other visitors who took part in the tour.

There were rave reviews, from the surface of the floors to the recreational facilities to the state-of-the-art medical treatment centers right on campus.

It is, in many ways, a city unto itself.

"It's a phenomenal campus," said David Donahue, commissioner for the Indiana Department of Corrections.

"It makes some of the other facilities around the country look like something out of the 18th century," another visitor noted.

But there also were some interesting statistics about what has happened here since GEO Group took over operations of the prison on Jan. 2.

According to Commissioner Donahue:

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- The GEO Group has created an additional 84 jobs since taking over.
- The management transition at the facility has resulted in local purchases of services and products of over \$500,000 to date.
- There are 141 offenders in education classes today; before GEO took over, there were approximately 20. There are 178 offenders in substance abuse classes today; before GEO took over, there were none.

Donahue also stressed that the offenders housed here are assisting the Henry County Sheriff's Department and the City of New Castle as well as the Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources. Currently, one crew is cleaning I-70 and another is working in the city. The crews are made up of prisoners from the minimum security housing unit.

Seven of the brand new buildings at the site are still empty, but Donahue said that because of privatization, that will change soon. Officials say that sometime in 2007, the facility could be full, with 2,400 offenders housed here.

That ultimately means more local jobs for Henry County. John Hurley, senior vice president of GEO Group, said the number of jobs could grow to 400 as the prison population is increased.

Hurley said the facility fits perfectly with the GEO Group family, which now consists of 58 facilities, and 48,000 beds in the United States, Australia, South Africa and Canada.

The privatization here also has Mid-America Health Services as a dental provider. "When you compare what's here to other facilities, this place would look like a palace," said Bill Mathews of Mid-America Health. "The taxpayers of Indiana can be proud." It's important to have such a facility at a prison, according to Mathews, because "a lot of folks incarcerated have never seen a dentist before. Ever."

Mathews said one of the biggest problems he currently sees comes from meth users. "The acid just chews up the enamel of the teeth," Mathews said. "It's a tremendous problem right now."

Officials said there are 120 prisoners at New Castle with Hepatitis C and six with AIDS. Also, Dr. Todd Chilton runs a 96-bed psychiatric facility inside the prison, helping prisoners deal with psychological problems or who are suicide risks. "This has been a vital link in our system," Donahue said.

About The Department of Correction

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department's home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department's Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.